

OKLAHOMA STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

DATE: June 28, 2000

TIME: 9:30 a.m.

PLACE: Metro Tech Conference Center
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

PRESENT: Darrel Dominick, Chairman, NRCS
Terry Peach, Farm Service Agency
Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency
Jim Stiegler, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Scott Stoodley, Oklahoma Conservation Commission
Terry Bidwell, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Mike Smolen, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Shawn Lepard, Pro Ag
Melanie Foster, Oklahoma Water Resources Board
Mike Thralls, Oklahoma Conservation Commission
Jeremy Rich, Oklahoma Farm Bureau
Ray West, City of Tulsa
David Redhage, Kerr Center for Sustainable Ag
D. Chongo Mundende, Langston University
Mike Houts, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality
Lance Meek, Oklahoma Wildlife Federation
Ken Williams, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
John Hendrix, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation
Donald Black, Oklahoma Council Quail Unlimited
Mason Mungle, Oklahoma Farmers Union
Jared Jones, Oklahoma Farmers Union
Dewayne Laxton, Chickasaw Nation
Clay Horton, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Mark Jackson, Ducks Unlimited
Steve Butler, Farm Service Agency State Committee
Jennifer Myers, Office of Secretary for Environment
Dayle Aldridge, OK Landowners & Tenants Assoc., REAP
Sam Johnston, Poultry Producer
Garl Mardis, Farm Service Agency
Monte Schammerhorn, Comanche Tribe
John Fantana, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Jack Eckroat, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Michael Padgett, Farm Service Agency
Ginger Lyde, Farm Service Agency
Milton Sovo, Caddo Tribe
Doug Bane, Cherokee Nation
Jack Coppedge, Farm Service Agency State Committee
Kevin Norton, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Chris Stoner, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Suzanne Collier, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Joni Hays, Natural Resources Conservation Service

1. Meeting Called to Order – Darrel Dominick, Chairman

Darrel Dominick, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. All present made introductions by stating their name and agency, organization or group affiliation. This meeting was held in compliance with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Laws.

2. Continuous CRP Signup Maintenance Rates – Rod Wanger, Farm Service Agency

Rod Wanger discussed current CRP Continuous Signup activity, reporting saline seeps having the most acreage at 9,790.6 acres with riparian buffers next with 377.1 acres.

Recent policy changes in the program involve providing a Signup Incentive Payment (SIP) which is \$10/acre/year for the following practices: Field Windbreaks, Shelterbelts, Living Snow Fences, Filter Strips, Riparian Buffers, and Waterways. This is a one time payment at approval of the contract. Additionally, a Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) is now being offered which is equal to 40% of eligible cost to install the practice and is applicable to all continuous signup practices. The payment is issued when cost data is received and verified. Rod also stated the existing rental rate incentive is a 20% addition on Field Windbreaks, Waterways, Filter Strips, and Riparian Buffers, and a 10% addition for Wellhead Protection (public water). A maintenance rate does not apply if maintenance is not required.

Rod then provided the maximum maintenance rates allowed: \$5 per acre for wellhead protection, waterways, shallow water areas, contour grass strips, saline seeps, cross wind traps, and land re-enrolled in CRP; \$7 per acre for field windbreaks, shelterbelts, and living snow fences. For Filter Strips there are 3 categories: \$5 if no fence or water developed, \$9 if fence and no water developed, and \$10 if fence and water developed. For Riparian Buffers there are also 3 categories: \$7 if no fence or water developed, \$9 if fence and no water developed, and \$10 if fence and water developed.

Rod commented on maintenance rate considerations such as prescribed burn, fence maintenance, mowing, weed control, etc. for the \$5 rate, and tree replacement, drip irrigation upkeep, tillage and herbicide control between rows, etc. for the \$7 rate.

Mason Mungle made a motion to approve all maintenance rates at the maximum level allowed. Mike Thralls seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

Rod concluded his presentation by stating that 5 counties have reached their 25% cropland limitation for CRP: Cimarron, Texas, Beaver, Harper, and Harmon counties.

A copy of Rod's PowerPoint presentation is attached.

3. Overview of EQIP Activity - Kevin Norton, NRCS

Kevin provided an overview of the EQIP program for FY 2000, stating that there are currently 2,470 contracts with \$12,108,160 obligated and 671,393 acres involved. There have been 100 cancellations for \$359,517 or 2.9%. For FY 2000, there are 30 priority areas with \$3,597,800 in total allocation. For the Statewide Priority Resource Concerns Outside Priority Areas, funding is distributed as follows: Soil Resources (40%) - \$249,024; Water Resources (10%) - \$62,256; Grazing Lands (40%) – Mesquite - \$50,460, Eastern redcedar - \$149,409, & Noxious weeds - \$50,460; and Fish & Wildlife (10%) - \$62,256. Mason Mungle asked whether there were more cancellations in the Priority Areas or the Resource Concerns. At this time, the information was not available.

4. State Technical Committee Funding Decisions for FY2001 EQIP - Kevin Norton, NRCS

- **Recommendation for distribution of funds to Priority Areas and Statewide Resource Concerns**

Kevin then discussed the role of the State Technical Committee and the three issues for consideration by the Committee: the 2000 priority areas to be carried over to 2001 (13 for \$1.9 million); the request to reauthorize 3rd year priority areas for 2001 (13 for \$2.3 million); and new priority area proposals which were received and ranked by an interdisciplinary team (13 for \$1.8 million). The total amount requested for all proposals for 2001 is \$6,081,888, and the total allocation received for 2000 was \$3,597,800.

Kevin outlined the guidelines for ranking and selecting priority areas, and discussed tribal priority areas. \$9-\$10 million is set aside at the national level for tribal work, and the total 2001 request from tribes is \$815,000. Scott Stoodley asked whether the 3% we take for EQIP educational assistance is inside that dollar amount for tribes. Kevin responded that the money comes to us as financial assistance at \$113,000/year, and the tribes let that go into the agreement we currently have with OSU.

Kevin provided the decisions before the State Technical Committee: (1) recommend priority area proposals and statewide priority concerns to the national office for consideration; (2) recommend approved priority areas and funding levels; and (3) determine distribution of funds between priority areas and statewide priority concerns. Kevin then discussed options for approval and allocation of new priority areas, and funding considerations. He stated that the amount of distribution between priority areas and statewide concerns can be no less than 65% of the total state allocation to priority areas, and 35% to statewide concerns. The distribution of funds is currently 80% to priority areas and 20% to statewide concerns.

Mason Mungle asked if there are more requests for statewide concerns than we are able to fund. Kevin responded that of 1,061 applications processed, 157 were funded (14%).

Mike Padgett stated that there is a lot of frustration concerning EQIP; if a farmer is in a priority area, it is great; but if he is not, there are a lot of applications taken and not a lot of funding given to the statewide concerns. Kevin responded that the original legislation was priority area based and then the statewide concerns were brought in, but the program was really designed for priority areas. He commented that even at 65%/35%, there will not be a significant increase in the volume of work, and in the past the Committee had discussed doing only priority areas and taking away the issue of statewide concerns.

Mason Mungle asked what other states' distribution of funds is, and Kevin responded that Kansas, Arkansas, and Louisiana have adopted 65%/35%, while Texas remains at 80%/20%.

Jack Coppedge stated that the Farm Service Agency State Committee feels a 65%/35% split would be best as they feel the affluent farmers are getting more than those who really need the program. Kevin showed a chart which indicated that if the distribution were changed to 65%/35%, 5 additional counties would receive funding above the 33 counties already receiving statewide concern funds. These counties would have only 1 contract each. Total statewide concern contracts would increase from 98 to 147 with 44 of these contracts going to counties already receiving statewide concerns funding. The analysis was based on the statewide concerns for soil erosion and eastern red cedar control. These make up the majority of the statewide funding.

Dayle Aldridge commented that small farmers are having a lot of outreach and education provided to them regarding EQIP, yet they are not getting money for the program. She would like to see smaller farms included in the program. Kevin responded that we need to work locally to get priority areas in place for these farmers.

Rod Wanger provided a handout on the comparison of 80%/20% versus 65%/35% distribution of funds, which indicated a possibility of 11 additional counties involved in statewide concerns, and also showed a drop in the number of applications since 1997. However, Rod's report did not include duplication of additional counties across multiple resource concerns. A single county could receive an additional contract in both soil resources and grazing lands. His records would count this twice as opposed to one additional county.

Darrel Dominick stated that the demand for the program is greater than the money provided and the frustration involves that fact; there needs to be more support to increase the allocation for the program.

Mason Mungle asked if there are any opportunities to prioritize to small producers. Kevin responded that he has visited with the national office regarding this; however, we cannot discriminate because of the operating unit and we cannot put this into the evaluation criteria. If small farmers could get together in an area and develop a priority area, this is probably the quickest way to deal with the issue.

Garl Mardis commented that producers are frustrated and feels that is indicated by the decline in the number of applications the last few years. He also stated that locally led efforts are not occurring in some places.

Mason Mungle stated that the National Small Farms Commission Report says that USDA is supposed to focus on small farms and recommended a \$300 million program. Kevin responded that this has not occurred and restructure of the program has not occurred.

Darrel Dominick stated that there needs to be a renewal of locally led conservation efforts. Darrel will work with core partners to ensure that we are doing all we can in this endeavor, and there is a lot of frustration concerning the dollars going into the program. Darrel asked for a motion from the floor to move forward on this issue.

Steve Butler made a motion to have a 70%/30% distribution of funds between priority areas/statewide concerns. Mason Mungle seconded the motion.

Several comments were made regarding this issue: the program might be hurt and diminished by changing the distribution; those who are organized and develop a priority area will be penalized; the farmer should not be penalized for the local group not developing a priority area; the committee should not re-distribute until we see where the program has gone the last 4 years; the Water Quality program has dove-tailed with EQIP and it has gone well with the objective of the priority areas; benefits to the environment are greater in a large area rather than here and there; we are having an environmental impact with the priority areas and support the same distribution; farmers have the opportunity to develop a priority area – it only takes one person to get this done; 5 counties have never received EQIP funding; originally Oklahoma received more funding because we were a priority area state and are still recognized as a model state for implementation, focusing on prioritization.

A vote was taken on the motion to change the distribution to 70%/30%.

The motion failed.

Jim Stiegler made a motion to retain the same allocation percentage of 80% to priority areas and 20% to statewide resource concerns. Ray West seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

Terry Peach and Darrel Dominick both expressed the need for a renewed effort on locally-led conservation, and they will work to get this issue resolved.

- **Recommendation for Third and Fourth Year Priority Areas**

The next issue brought before the Committee was Third and Fourth Year Priority Areas. Kevin stated that the committee could disapprove all proposals, approve and forward all proposals for an additional year of funding, or pick and choose which ones should be continued. The Review Team ranked the Top 10 which would involve \$1,630,00 for all proposals. The Review Team ranked 7 to be continued which would involve \$1.38 million: Wewoka Creek; Cobb Creek; Kay County Grazing Lands; Eucha-Spavinaw; Grand Lake & Tributaries; Salt Fork; and Illinois River-Lake Tenkiller.

Mike Thralls made a motion to continue the top 7 proposals. Jim Stiegler seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

- **Recommendation for New Priority Area Proposals**

The Review Team also evaluated 13 new priority area proposals and completed an environmental and technical review. The technical review ranked at the top the following 6 new proposals for \$1.3 million: Cottonwood Canyon; Northwest Beaver Creek; Grayson Lower Deep Fork; Kickapoo Nations Watershed; Salt Creek; and Little Deer Creek.

Mason Mungle made a motion to accept the top 6 proposals. Jim Stiegler seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

- **Recommendation for Approval of Sliding Scale for Funding Priority Areas**

The following sliding scale is now being used to fund priority areas:

Financial Assistance Request	% Funded
< \$75,000	100
\$75,000 - \$200,000	70
\$200,000 - \$500,000	65
>\$500,000	50

The Committee was asked if this scale should remain in place for FY 2001 priority areas.

Lance Meek made a motion to accept this sliding scale for funding priority areas. Milton Sovo seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

- **Recommendation for Amount of Money to be Allocated to New Priority Areas**

\$300,000 is the amount which was determined feasible in the past year, and a comment was made that this amount has been working.

Jim Stiegler made a motion to continue allocating \$300,000 to new priority areas. Mason Mungle seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

- **Recommendation for Statewide Priority Resource Concerns**

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Soils**

The Committee was asked whether soils should be continued as a statewide concern.

Jack Coppedge made a motion to continue with the Soil Resources Concern. Jim Stiegler seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Water**

Lance Meek made a motion to continue with the Water Resources Concern. Chongo Mundende seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Grazing Lands**

A comment was made that field offices believe we created a mini-priority area with the Natural Resources Priority Concerns funding. Other comments included: treating musk thistle in a random fashion is not dealt with very well in a priority concern; there will never be a dent made in the problem with mesquite and noxious weeds; we need to regionalize or discontinue; the #1 grazing land issue now is the eastern redcedar

John Hendrix made a motion to do something different on the grazing land concern.

Dewayne Laxton amended the motion to take money from the mesquite and noxious weeds and put in the eastern redcedar. Milton Sovo seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

John Hendrix amended his original motion to state that the order of the grazing lands concerns should be changed to: (1) loss of plant diversity; (2) invasion of brush; and (3) excessive water erosion. Don Black seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

A group was selected to meet concerning this issue: Mason Mungle, John Hendrix, Rod Wanger, Don Black, Kevin Norton, Ken Williams, and Mark Moseley.

- **Statewide Priority Resource Concern for Fish & Wildlife**

The question before the Committee was should we continue with prioritization for the Lesser Prairie Chicken. John Hendrix commented that they have tried to increase the nesting habitat and increase range conditions for them, but will not see results for a few years.

Ken Williams made a motion to continue with the Lesser Prairie Chicken. Don Black seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

- **Recommended Allocations to Priority Resource Concerns**

The Committee was asked to recommend allocations to priority resource concerns. The allocations in place at present are:

40% - Soil Resources
10% - Water Resources
40% - Grazing Lands
10% - Fish & Wildlife

Mason Mungle made a motion to accept the allocations as currently distributed. Terry Peach seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed.

5. Other Comments – Kevin Norton, NRCS

Kevin commented that the conservation practices list is put together in September or October, If any of the Committee members would like to be a part of the process, please let Joni Hays know. John Hendrix, Doug Bane, and Mike Thralls indicated a desire to assist in the process.

Kevin also stated that the Farmland Protection Program may be opened to non-governmental agencies for proposals. NRCS will send out information once it comes out.

6. Report on EQIP Educational Activities – Jack Eckroat, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

Jack Eckroat spoke to the group regarding EQIP educational assistance and materials available. There is a web site available which provides a list of seminars and provides information on how to apply for funds.

7. Adjournment – Darrel Dominick

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.